

REMARKS

Claims 1-38 remain in the application.

All of the claims stand rejected under either 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) or under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a). All of the rejections rely either entirely or primarily on the Maruyama reference (U.S. Patent No. 6,430,498). However, applicants respectfully note that the Maruyama reference does not qualify as prior art relative to this application. In particular, the Maruyama reference has a filing date of July 11, 2000, which is after the filing date (June 14, 2000) of this application. It is therefore respectfully submitted that the pending rejections should be withdrawn.

CONCLUSION

In view of the above, applicants respectfully request allowance of the pending claims. Applicants' silence with respect to comments made in the Office Action (e.g., comments directed to various dependent claims) does not imply agreement with those comments.

If any issues remain, or if the Examiner has any further suggestions for expediting allowance of the present application, the Examiner is kindly invited to contact the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,

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Date



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